

Learning Points – Tough Slam Even Double Dummy

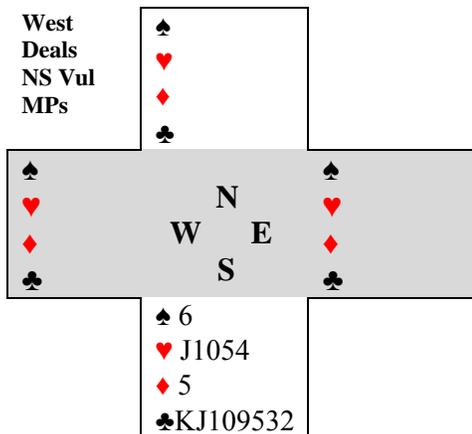
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Defense Level: Intermediate/Advanced

Ft Wayne Regional Bracket II Knockout Teams, Round I, September 24, 2010

Knockout Teams place a premium on vulnerable games and slams, especially in a 3-way match. 3-way matches are usually 12 boards and play and feel more like Swiss Teams than Knockouts. At the other table the opponents bid to 3N and made 4 for +630. How would you do on this board?



West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1N ¹
Pass	3N	Pass	???

1=Forcing (5-11 HCP)

points are working. 1N forcing tells North that South will be in the 5-11 HCP range. North has a standard jump to 3N saying “I have a semi-balanced 20-21 HCP and we have game.” Why semi-balanced? North would open 2NT with a balanced 20-21. 5422 is the typical semi-balanced shape. South now faces a choice.

Certainly a long ♣ suit offers tricks in 3NT. The question is, can the two hands combine to make 6♣??

The Losing Trick Count: Once you have a trump fit [8+ cards] count the losers in your hand, estimate the losers in partner’s hand, and add them together. Subtract this number from 24 to determine the number of winning tricks likely available to your side. Adjust down for offside honors opponents are known to hold.

South bids the ♣ game, seeking safety at IMPs. North now takes time to evaluate the hand. North knows partner should have at least an 8-loser hand or better with very long ♣s. North counts 4 losers (1/2 loser each for the minor suit kings – finesses you know) and decides that providing partner with the ♣AQ should make the small slam a sound contract.

The Play

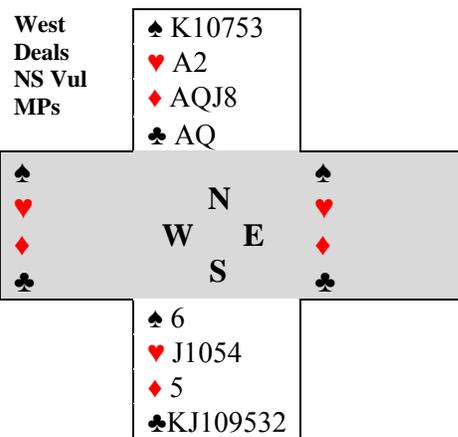
Do you declare or defend? This slam is incredibly tricky. The defense began with a passive trump lead. Declarer can count 9 tricks: 7♣, 1♦, and 1♥. 1 trick might come from the ♦ finesse (10) but we still need 2 more tricks. Losing an immediate trick in ♥ or ♦ sinks the contract (the ♠A cashes). How should declarer proceed?

The best hope is that ♠s break 4-3 (a 67% chance). Notice that South is entry poor and that North needs at least 2 entries to ruff at least 2 rounds of ♠s.

This leads to a spectacular play at trick 2: lead a small ♠ from dummy! Watch what happens...

The Bidding

North has a 20 HCP powerhouse and one too many losers for a strong forcing artificial 2♣ opening bid (shows 4 losers and 4 quick tricks or a strong balanced hand of 22 HCP +). South has an interesting opportunity. Based on HCP alone (5) passing might come to mind. But good bridge is about tricks, and tricks are about distribution and working points. South certainly has enough distribution with a 7-card ♣ suit to offer 1N (forcing). All South’s



West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1N ¹
Pass	3N	Pass	5♣
Pass	6♣	All Pass	

East leads ♣4
1= Forcing (5-11 HCP)

East will duck perforce (East does not want to lead into the strong Dummy). West will win cheaply and can now return anything without hurting declarer. Let's say West returns a ♥. Declarer wins ♥A and ruffs a ♠ (the ♠J falling from West). A ♣ to the Table extracts the remaining trump and South ruffs a 3rd round of ♠s. The suit is kind (as it needs to be) - West plays the ♠A. Now South ratchets up courage and finesses the ♦K. When this holds, South can pitch 3 losing ♥s on the ♦A, ♠K, and ♠10 (Yes the ♠Q falls under the ♠K – the 4th round of the suit).

Post Mortem

Do you declare or defend? You should choose to **defend!**

If West opens with an attacking ♥ instead of a passive trump, declarer has no chance to set up spades before opponents win the setting trick in hearts. Try it!

Should West find the ♥ lead? Perhaps. First, this slam is likely bid based on distribution, not strength. Why do we suspect this? South began with a forcing 1NT response. ♥s were never mentioned. North cannot have 4 ♥s given the bidding, and South can have at most 4 ♥s. ♦s are an active possibility, but North rates to hold a tenace over the ♦K. Underleading the ♥Q seems like a reasonable attacking lead.

Certainly this bidding calls for an attacking lead.

Why is leading trump less effective here? Normally a trump lead is aimed at reducing the number of ruffs in the short hand (usually dummy) or when declarer is likely 4-4 in trumps. North has shown a semi-balanced hand – no singletons or voids. North is not as likely to provide ruffing tricks. South has shown very long trumps – leading a trump does nothing to harm South's ruffing power.

As for South, he should count losers to reach the conclusion that the small slam is a good bet... South has a 7 loser hand with ♣s as trumps. North has 5 losers. South estimates North should have 5 losers or less for an average 20 HCP hand. $24 - (7 + 5) = 12$. South knows the combined hands have 12 losers. That means there are 12 winners NS should be able to take 12 tricks in ♣s. South should check on Aces and head for the small ♣ slam.

Learning Points

1. Think TRICKS not just HCP when responding to partner. A 2-loser 7-card suit is worth a simple response. Just don't mislead partner by bidding too strongly.
2. When partner jumps to game with a 20+ HCP powerhouse, attribute about 5 losers to their hand. The Losing Trick Count for your hand can then help you decide if slam is appropriate when you hold a very long suit.
3. When declaring a difficult or hopeless contract, keep your wits about you. Analyzing your winners, losers and threats can help you find the one path that can work. Yes the path might require miracles (we call them low probability plays), but remember: **LOW PROBABILITY** always beats **NO PROBABILITY**.
4. When leading against slams attacking leads are almost always preferred to passive leads. Trump leads are necessary when you fear an offensive cross-ruff. That is not the case when one hand holds a very long trumps suit.

Keywords: Losing Trick Count, Plan the Play, Attacking and Passive Leads, Declare or Defend.

West Deals NS Vul MPs	♠ K10753 ♥ A2 ♦ AQJ8 ♣ AQ	
♠ AJ8 ♥ Q973 ♦ K1072 ♣ 84	N W E S	♠ Q942 ♥ K86 ♦ 9643 ♣ 76
	♠ 6 ♥ J1054 ♦ 5 ♣ KJ109532	<u>Deep Finesse:</u> 4N, 6♣ on any lead but ♥x (Down 1).